**Application for the MBA at Insead - Recommendation letter of Maximilian Flötotto for Alessia Cheng**

1. **How long have you known the candidate? Define your relationship with the candidate and the circumstances whereby you met.**

I have known Alessia for almost two years now and had the pleasure of working with her on one of my major projects, that I led as a senior partner at McKinsey & Co. We helped an Austrian client build a new bank from scratch with a very ambitious timeline of just under 12 months. Having spent nearly 6 months on the project together, I got to know Alessia and her working style very well. We had regular interaction on client-meeting teams, multi-day offsite event, feedback session, and enjoyed a very nice long coaching walk together where we discussed her very ambitious development and career goals.

The project we worked on was a very large endeavor with quite a complex setup of various stakeholders (~XXM EUR budget, ~50+ client team members, ~10+ project teams, 3 other consultancies on the ground). Alessia was an integral part for the success of the launch of the bank. Six months after its launch the bank already onboarded 50.000 customers.

Her role was very demanding as she had to wear many hats at the same time. She played a key role in the project management office, which meant creating the overall project plan, having the strategic vision in mind, coordinating the different workstreams and managing multiple stakeholders. Further to that, she often had to take on additional side projects as our business building project demanded her to not only work strategically but also operatively. Together with the clients she developed the customer service management, prepared the service level agreements, and established the go-to-market taskforce just to name a few. Her responsibilities also included the steering and coordination of some of the senior management (e.g., leading the weekly head of business unit jour fixe, project steering committees and the communications/marketing board meetings).

I have thoroughly enjoyed working with Alessia and would gladly do so again.

1. **Comment on the candidate's career progress to date and his/her career focus.**

Having worked at McKinsey for many years I have come across many high potential talents. However, compared to her peer group, Alessia has impressed me with her engaging, passionate, and empathetic leadership and I would put her in the top 5% of her peers.

When I first met Alessia I first noticed her positive and open personality, XXX, XXX [further characteristics/skills that you've noticed about me/first impressions 😊].

As the project evolved I noticed what an integral role Alessia played, e.g., almost everyone on the project across all seniority levels knew Alessia (we were at one point more than 80 people on the project), she was leading the daily check-ins with the McKinsey teams, had biweekly touchpoints with all the business unit heads and supported the CEO directly on the project steering committee whilst finding the time to organize fun events such as the "fuck-up-nights (FUN)" to encourage a culture of accepting and learning from mistakes. I specifically remember one FUN where she created a very active game to mix all team members, so that the whole project team could get to know each other better. Her goal was to strengthen the "one-team" mentality and integrate the new project members.

I watched Alessia develop quickly from owning one single workstream to branching out wearing multiple hats and becoming a full-fledged self-standing team member. She needed very little steering and worked with focus and drive. She confidently executed all tasks to the highest of quality and was engaging during group discussions and strategic meetings. I also noticed how she really enjoyed venturing deeper into the business building world, as she coordinated our "impact board" inviting other successful FinTechs or founders to offer external impulse for the CEO and team. Alessia was clearly very passionate about the entrepreneurial part of our project together, as she continued to do further digital business building projects, e.g. building of a Greenfield Leasing company, creating new business unit for an Automotive player etc.

For her future, I believe that she should bring together her strengths with her passion for the tech sector and venture building. I strongly believe that a MBA at Insead will help her accelerate her development towards her ambitions.

1. **What do you consider to be the candidate's major strengths? Comment on the factors that distinguish the candidate from other individuals at his/her level.**

Alessia has two distinctive major spikes that significantly let her stand out amongst her peers.

1. **Exceptionally engaging and caring people leader**

Alessia has impressed me with her engaging and empathetic personality. She genuinely showed a lot of care for her team members, coaching a junior associate who joined the team and always made sure every new team member got a proper onboarding and was quickly integrated. We also had a somewhat difficult new client who didn’t find her footing right from the beginning, and Alessia invested the time to take one-on-one sessions with her to draw out a roadmap for the branding, and supported in the communications/branding workshop sessions.

People truly enjoyed working with her and have fun while doing so. Alessia also has the talent to captivate the attention of people by engaging and motivating them. An example that comes to mind was on our offsite with nearly 200 people and Alessia presenting and moderating a section on the project development. With much enthusiasm she managed to get all members to engage through a bonding activity and breakout sessions.

Alessia was much valued by her team, and clients. So much so, that we kept extending her for two more times to stay longer on the project per request by the clients and her team. I've noticed with what ease Alessia navigated her way across all project teams, whether it was a client led team, senior management, or the other consultancy teams. She built trusting relationships in just a short amount of time and was a promoter of co-creation. She also worked very closely with the CEO and chief of staff who really valued her as a team member and often sought her advice. When she rolled off the project the CEO took a one-on-one session to debrief and discuss with her how she assessed the future of the bank. Even now they are still in touch and Alessia nurtures the relationship through personal check-ins but also reached out during her other projects for possible collaboration, e.g., external speeches, impulse sessions etc.

1. **Outstanding client impact and experience leader**

Alessia has exhibited tremendous drive to contribute and deliver. She is also highly focused on creating an outstanding experience for both her team and the client. To coordinate such a large team on a tight deadline, Alessia quickly adapted a very agile way of working, cutting through a lot of bureaucracy to make quick decisions and achieve fast results. She introduced the demo sessions into our "information breakfast" each week where each business unit presented the status of the MVP they were working on. Previously it was a set agenda with power point presentations which turned more into a collaborative and engaging "show and discuss".

She created great client impact by pushing through one of the hardest hurdles we had, the service level agreements (SLA). I remember when the deadline came, she supported our junior partner the night before in drafting the agreements until late into the night. Meeting that deadline for the SLAs was a major milestone for an on-schedule launch. She also helped on the marketing and branding strategy as well as our "friends and family" soft launch roadmap which allowed the smooth onboarding of new customers.

Alessia was always collaborating and adding great value to our team discussions, as she had a better overview of the entire project, she sometimes challenged the other business units on their approach to find a resolution that would best achieve the goals. When running the Go-To-Market taskforce she ensured that all projects teams would stay informed. However, to streamline the process, she only included the head of business units that would operatively be involved in the roll-out and launch in all the meetings. This severely alleviated the stress for many business units and created a much better working experience for most of them.

Overall, Alessia has created a great environment for collaboration during her time on the project and set some important fundamentals that helped the project to success.

1. **What do you consider to be the candidate’s major weaknesses?**

Though always affirmative and assured, she sometimes finds it hard to say "no" to certain people or tasks which results in her taking on too much onto her plate at once. This interferes with her work life balance and may not be very sustainable in the long run. In line with this I believe that she could also sometimes she could also be a bit sterner during difficult situations, so that people do not take advantage of her positive and friendly character. I recommend her to XXXX

[Hier auch gerne komplett neu schreiben, falls du nicht mit der Schwäche übereinstimmst 😊]

1. **Comment on the candidate’s potential for senior management. Do you see him/her as a future leader?**

I can say with confidence that Alessia will be great in a senior management position. She has winning qualities to make a great leader: empathy and charisma. The first trait will become more and more important in the corporate world as the topic of work life balance, purpose and flat hierarchies come into play. Alessia has shown that she has the capabilities to deliver the needed work but also carries a caring nature towards her team members and clients which will surely make her an appreciated and valued leader. Her ability to captivate other people's attention and be motivating will win her a big fellowship. I've seen her successfully take on a leadership role during the project in handling some of the project teams as well as coaching and leading a junior associate and new project members.

Having already the foundations to become a great leader, I believe the Insead MBA will be an accelerator for her to transition into a senior management position.

1. **Describe the candidate as a person. Comment on his/her ability to establish and maintain relationships, sensitivity to others, self-confidence, attitude, etc. Specifically comment on the candidate's behavior or skills in a group setting/team environment.**

Alessia's way of interacting with people is one of her core strengths as mentioned before. She is a peoples' person. Alessia is an outstanding team player and has great leadership qualities that enables her to garner a quick followship and rapport from her superiors, co-workers and clients. I have experienced her as a very open, optimistic character which has been very catching. She is very encouraging, caring and sensitive towards her colleagues across all seniority levels, who all would love to work with her again. She shows genuine care for her team members, seeking and offering feedback sessions, helping new members with various tasks and manages to create a very comfortable and enjoyable environment for everyone. Alessia also emphasizes on building long-lasting relationships and fosters these even beyond the project. She is still in contact with many of the clients to this date and is recommended by many of her peers or managers.

Alessia is extremely dedicated and driven to achieve her goals. She shows outstanding focus and very high levels of self-assurance. She confidently navigates through complex and difficult professional situations with senior clients with ease. She achieves her tasks to the highest quality and shows high independence in tackling challenges. She does this all with a very positive attitude in a way that is both inclusive and collaborative.

I highly recommend Alessia and am certain she will be an invaluable member of the Insead's MBA class. She will XXX [not ein paar abschließende Worte].